

ARE PARENTING INTERVENTIONS TRANSFERABLE ACROSS SETTINGS? ASSESSING KEY CONSTRAINTS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



IN A NUTSHELL

- Improve children's learning, attendance and promotion rates, by increasing parental awareness and engagement in their children's education.
- Understand more about how to foster successful home-school relationships, as well as how to tailor behavioral nudge interventions to different children and parents to be most effective.
- Investigate if and how high rates of illiterate parents and high rates of teacher absence constrain the transfer an intervention across settings, from Brazil to Ivory Coast.

MOTIVATION

Both youth and adult literacy rates in Ivory Coast are low, estimated at 53% and 44%, respectively, with large disparities for marginalized groups, including females and poor children. Ivorian authorities are employing various strategies as part of reforms to meet the goals of improving learning and increasing literacy through universal education.

One approach to promoting education and learning is to increase parental awareness and engagement regarding their children's education, known to be key predictors of children's academic achievement. To do that, Ivorian authorities plan to implement Eduq+, a platform powered by MGov — a Brazilian social impact startup — that allows schools to send messages to parents with information about their child's attendance and grades, and which nudges them with motivating facts and suggested activities to engage them in their child's school life. The SMS text-based version of Eduq+ has been shown to be effective in Brazil, where communication with parents had large impacts on attendance, test scores, and school promotion rates. However, such intervention might not work as intended in poorer settings, for at least two reasons: parents have a much higher likelihood of being illiterate, and teachers have a much higher probability of being absent from schools. In the first case, audio messages may be more effective. In the second case, teachers may also benefit from behavioral supports. This project investigates whether those reasons are critical constraints for transferring the intervention across settings, in the context of in Ivory Coast.

We seek to understand more about how to foster successful home-school relationships, as well as how to tailor behavioral nudge interventions to different children and parents to be most effective, with implications for national educational interventions.

PROJECT PLAN

The program to be tested in Ivory Coast has two important features that differ from the one previously evaluated in Brazil. First, Eduq+ will send messages not only to parents, but also to teachers, with nudges to encourage higher attendance and suggested activities on how to implement best practices and customize their classes to fit the needs of their students, in order to impact the quality of teaching.



This project randomly assigns whether parents receive text or voice messages, and cross-randomizes the intervention across parents and teachers. For parents, we will consider the differential impacts of audio-messaging vs. text-messaging, as well as what characteristics of children and parents can boost the educational gains from the program and why. Indeed, for educational efforts to be truly successful at scale, it is needed an understanding of what characteristics of children and their parents support or serve as barriers to the success of interventions to improve educational outcomes.

The intervention has been designed and is being implemented by the Ministry of Education of Ivory Coast and MGov. It will randomly assign students' parents and teachers to receive messages by the schools and by MGov, and will be evaluated through a field randomized control trial with one hundred schools in two regions in Ivory Coast. We will assess the impact of the program on students' grade retention, attendance and drop-out rates, using administrative data from approximately 20'000 families targeted by the intervention.

POLICY AND PROGRAMATIC IMPLICATIONS

With the goal of improving learning and increasing literacy in Ivory Coast, the Ivorian government has been trying to expand the access to education for all children between the age of 6 and 16. However, students' learning outcomes are still poor: pupils in Ivory Coast perform relatively worse than in other developing countries.

We propose to build on a unique opportunity to learn significantly more about the science of learning in this context. Indeed, this research project expands the current program, by examining two different delivery approaches to reach parents (SMS and audio messages) and determining how individual level characteristics of students and their caregivers affect the program's impacts on educational outcomes. This will pave the way for replication in other countries with low adult literacy rates.

BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS

If parents invest more in their children's education, the impact of Eduq+ will be an improvement in attendance, higher grades and promotion rates, and a decrease in school dropout rates. Moreover, we expect that the effects of Eduq+ will be greater for children whose teachers also receive messages with nudges to boost their motivation and with information about best practices.

Ultimately, the evaluation of the program will allow us to understand more about how to foster successful home-school relationships, as well as how to tailor behavioral nudge interventions to different children and parents to be most effective, with implications for national educational interventions in Ivory Coast and abroad.

PARTNERS

The project started in July 2018 and will take place through October 2019. It is sponsored by the Jacobs Foundation and executed by the University of Zürich in collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania and Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA).

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